DSW employees tackle Whole Systems Change

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Story and photos by Melissa Chiechi

Western strives to provide quality service to its customers. In the Desert Southwest Region, employees recently used the Whole Systems Change process to better serve internal and external customers. This process allowed many employees to be involved in finding solutions for the whole organization.

The WSC process began in 1982. First used by Ford Motor Co., it brings people together from across an organization and helps them create systemwide solutions. In DSW, this meant starting the process with a two-day meeting with more than 160 employees participating.

The two-day event

The first day focused on gathering information. Employees broke into groups of eight to 10 people who worked together through most of the event.

Groups finished seven assignments to identify problems and find solutions.

As each assignment was completed, groups came together and shared comments.

Between assignments, employees listened to a variety of speakers. Marilyn White, from Performance Skills Incorporated, opened the day by posing questions such as: "What is customer service to your customers?" and "What is it to you?"

White cautioned participants, "Make sure your words match your behavior, because behavior is believable."

Three DSW customers shared their views and answered questions. John Branch, city of Mesa; Mark Mitchell, Arizona Power Authority; and Jim Rein, Arizona Electric Power Cooperative, suggested ways for DSW to improve. Their tips included having single points of contact, getting out to customers "where they are" and evaluating rules and regulations to create flexibility.

*Operations Manager **Tim Calkins** and **Mary McFadden,** an administrative assistant, discuss group comments.*

After listening to customers, employees heard a "possibilities panel" composed of successful customer service providers. Ronnie Taylor of Duke Power Co., in Greensboro, N.C., described how his company improved its position by making three key changes: focusing on customers, concentrating on results and moving with speed.

Other suggestions included creating a quality advisory council, implementing a two-hour rule for returning phone calls and designating a customer service representative or single point of contact for each customer.

Next, employees decided on "preferred future" office themes. Each group presented its suggestions and then each employee voted. Themes included nine elements of change, from communication to continuous employee development. Finally, each group created short- and long-term plans to enact and improve upon one of the themes.

After the meeting

After the meeting, the planning committee completed a follow-up report to summarize the event. Each functional group also created individual action plans to build its "preferred future." An oversight committee of 10 employees meets regularly to report progress internally and externally.

DSW employees see both challenge and hope ahead. As Regional Manager **Tyler Carlson** said, "Today, we are a good organization. We do well within our functional areas. We need to take steps to become an excellent organization—Whole Systems Change will help us begin to do that."

(Note: Chiechi is a public affairs specialist in Phoenix.)
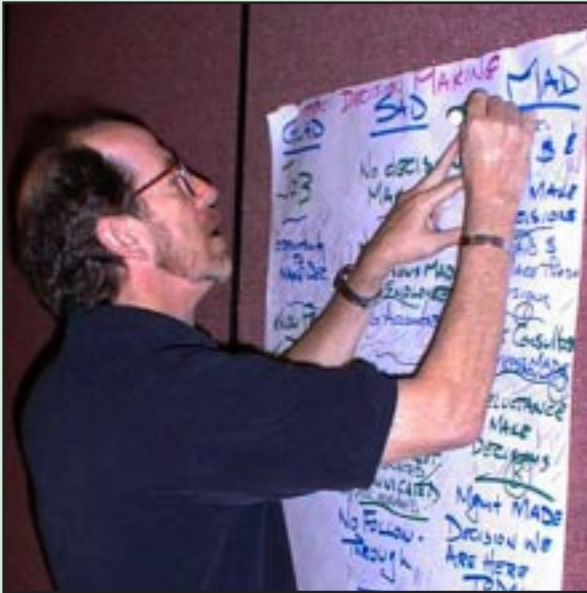
Michael Wheeler, an IS computer specialist, records a group decision.

Preferred themes for customer service

As part of the Whole Systems Change process, DSW employees addressed and committed themselves to nine challenging themes:

◆ **Timely handling of customer matters**

◆ **Continuous employee development toward service excellence with trust**

◆ **Enough people and resources to do the job**

◆ **No barriers between Federal employees and contractors**

◆ **No commitments outside your function**

◆ **Improved communication**

◆ **Customer service representative/single point of contact**

◆ **Monetary awards**

◆ **Accountability**